

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 1751

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PINT, TW
SUBJECT: PRESBYTERIAN CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

REF: (A) 77 TAIPEI 728, (B) 77 TAIPEI 6226,
(C) TAIPEI 1383, (D) 77 STATE 209883 (NOTAL)

1. HAVING FAILED TO CONVINCE THE TAIWAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO MODIFY ITS CONTROVERSIAL "DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS" IN A WAY WHICH WOULD MAKE ITS ADVOCACY OF TAIWAN INDEPENDENCE MORE COMPATIBLE WITH THE OFFICIAL NATIONAL IDEOLOGY (SEE REF A), THE GROC/KMT ESTABLISHMENT IS ACTIVELY TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WITHIN THE CHURCH IN ORDER TO DISCREDIT THE ORIGINAL "DECLARATION" AND PREVENT THE REELECTION OF THE CURRENT GENERAL SECRETARY KAO CHUN-MING AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING MARCH 28-31. SUCH POLITICAL MANEUVERING IS LIKELY TO KEEP THE ISSUE OF TAIWAN INDEPENDENCE IN THE PUBLIC EYE, AND TO ENGENDER CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF THIS
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SENSITIVE TOPIC IN THE MEDIA.

2. THE CHURCH'S NORTHERN SYNOD MET IN TANSUI ON MARCH 14 AND 15. (THE TAIWAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN DIVIDED INTO A SOUTHERN SYNOD COMPOSED OF ELEVEN PRESBYTERIES ORIGINALLY FOUNDED BY BRITISH MISSIONARIES, AND THE NORTHERN SYNOD COMPOSED OF FOUR PRESBYTERIES

ORIGINALLY FOUNDED BY CANADIAN MISSIONARIES.) THERE WAS HEATED DISCUSSION OF THE PROPRIETY OF LAST SUMMER'S "DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS" AND, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, A MOTION TO ENJOIN CHURCH LEADERS FROM PRESSING POLITICAL VIEWS NOT REFLECTIVE OF THE MAJORITY OF THE CHURCH WAS DISCUSSED. HOWEVER, IN AN OPEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LETTER DATED MARCH 17, THE OFFICES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (CURRENTLY CONTROLLED BY THE SOUTHERN SYNOD) CLAIMS THAT PUTTING THE MOTION ON THE AGENDA WAS DEFEATED 67 TO 13.

3. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE MEETING OF THE NORTH SYNOD HAS CONTINUED TO TREAT THE ISSUE OF INDEPENDENCE IN AN UNPRECEDENTEDLY PUBLIC WAY. THIS PUBLIC EXPOSURE OF A SENSITIVE ISSUE BEGAN IN LAST OCTOBER'S CHINA TIDE MAGAZINE (REF B) AND HAS CONTINUED OFF AND ON IN NEWS-PAPERS AND MAGAZINES EVER SINCE. THE GREAT MAJORITY OF REPORTING AND COMMENTARY HAS BEEN STRONGLY CRITICAL OF THE CHURCH'S STAND, AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT. THE PREMIER HIMSELF HAS JOINED THE INDEPENDENCE CONTROVERSY WITH AN UNPRECEDENTEDLY DIRECT PUBLIC CONDEMNATION OF TAIWANESE INDEPENDENCE (REF C), BUT WITHOUT MAKING SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE CONTROVERSY WITHIN THE CHURCH.

4. WE EXPECT THE CONTROVERSY TO BE HEIGHTENED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH MARCH 28-31. THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXPECTS THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GROC/KMT ESTABLISHMENT WILL MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO BLOCK THE REELECTION OF GENERAL SECRETARY KAO CHUN-MING. HOWEVER, REV. KAO'S OFFICE CLAIMS THAT HE HAS ALREADY RECEIVED THE SUPPORT OF 14 OF THE 15 PRESBYTERIES FOR ANOTHER TERM. IN THE LIKELY EVENT THAT CRITICISM OF THE CHURCH'S PAST POLITICAL ACTIVITY MOUNTS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE CURRENT CHURCH ADMINISTRATION WILL GO BACK ON THE AGREEMENT IT SAYS IT HAS GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT NOT TO DISCUSS PUBLICALLY THE "DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS."

5. COMMENT: SO FAR, THE ESTABLISHMENT HAS MANAGED TO KEEP THE LID ON THE PRESBYTERIAN POT THROUGH A JUDICIOUS MIXTURE OF REASONABLENESS, CONSULTATION, PUBLIC CRITICISM, AND THREATS. (IN THE LATTER REGARD, THE GENERAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE HAS TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THE MARCH 19 TAIWAN PRESBYTERIAN WEEKLY HAS BEEN CONFISCATED -- SEE REF D -- ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM THIS ELSEWHERE.) SHOULD THE DEBATE FLARE -- AND PARTICULARLY IF PRO-DECLARATION SENTIMENTS ARE AIRED -- THE GROC MAY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN PERMITTING WHAT COULD WELL TURN INTO A FULL-SCALE DISCUSSION OF THE INDEPENDENCE OPTION, AND MAKING SOME PRESBYTERIAN MARTYRS.

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